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PSC and MSU Wheeler Center Set Montana Energy Forum For January 18

“Riding the Waves,” a public forum on Montana energy issues, will be held Saturday, January 18, 2003, beginning at 9:30 a.m., at the West Coast Colonial Hotel in Helena. The forum is jointly sponsored by the Montana Public Service Commission and the Burton K. Wheeler Center for the Exploration of Montana Issues at Montana State University.

Wholesale market issues to be addressed during the forum include Federal Energy Regulatory Commission proposals that will significantly affect Montana, the role of the Bonneville Power Administration, and regional market forecasts. Retail and other more Montana-specific issues of concern to both larger and smaller Montana customers and their providers will be discussed. These issues include potential responses to repeal of House Bill 474, development of the default supply portfolio for NorthWestern’s customers, retail choice options, supply-side and demand-side issues. BPA Administrator Steve Wright will deliver a luncheon keynote.

According to PSC Chairman Bob Rowe, “Montana’s retail energy situation is linked in a variety of ways to the regional wholesale energy markets, especially the western market. Therefore, the energy forum will begin with a discussion of national and regional policy and market issues, and move down to retail issues and options as the day progresses.”

Rowe noted that the regional wholesale power markets are critical to Montana and that the forum is part of the Commission’s strong focus in this area, which will also include “Wholesale Market Day,” at the Commission, on Friday, January 17.

Wheeler Center Executive Director Dr. Gordon G. Brittan said, “Two years ago the Wheeler Center sponsored a conference in Helena on utility deregulation. It’s time for state and federal agencies, the PSC, and the Montana Legislature to re-visit the policy and market issues raised there, particularly in light of the repeal of House Bill 474. We need to move now, from uncertainty to opportunity.”

To register for the Energy Forum, or to view a current version of the agenda, go to the PSC’s web site at www.psc.state.mt.us. There is a \$15 charge for the conference, which includes lunch. There is no charge for legislators.

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